

Grade 8 - Informational

Wessels Living History Farm

At one time, most people in the United States lived on farms. Today, few people have the opportunity to experience that way of life. Wessels Living History Farm helps visitors experience what farming in Nebraska was like from the 1920s to the present.

A Gift from David Wessels

David Wessels was born in 1917 and grew up on a farm near York, Nebraska. His sister recalls the hard work and fun they had on the farm. The children were raised to always do their best. David served in the army during World War II, but he returned to Nebraska after the war. When their parents retired, David and his brothers continued their commitment to farming.

David Wessels was a farmer all his life. When he died in 1993, he left land and money to create a living history farm on a portion of his 160-acre farm in York County. Wessels wanted people to know what life on a Nebraska farm was like. He wanted them to know how people lived, worked, survived drought and depression, went to war, returned and took advantage of new technologies. He wanted to share the story of Nebraska farmers and the impact they had on the world food market.

Between 1995 and 2000, the York Community Foundation developed a plan to carry out the wishes of David Wessels. The plan had two main goals. The first was to develop an educational Web site that would present a history of farming in York County from the 1920s to the present. The second was to create a 1920s farm site.

Developing a Learning Resource

In February 2003, Nebraska Education Television Network completed the first section of a Web site titled "Farming in the 1920s." In 2004, Ganzel Group Communications of Lincoln helped complete the planning process and created the next section of the Web site called "Farming in the 1930s."

Now Web viewers may read about and see photos not only from the 1920s and 1930s but also from the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s to the present. With the click of a mouse, the Web site brings to life the experiences of farmers in Nebraska. Through dramatic video interviews, farmers share experiences from their daily lives. Viewers of the Living History Web site learn about the social, economic, and cultural differences between life on a farm and life in the cities.

Some Highlights of Farming History

In the 1920s, many farms lacked electricity, indoor plumbing, refrigerators, and other conveniences enjoyed by city dwellers. During the economic hard times of the

1930s, farm families enjoyed low cost entertainment, such as barn dances. During the 1940s, many farmers left the farm for the cities or to serve in the military. When the war ended, new technologies had been developed. Service men and women returned home with new skills that helped increase productivity on farms. The farm equipment improved from the 1930s, making the work in fields easier and quicker.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the number of farms declined as farmers left for jobs in cities. Today, only a small percentage of Americans live in rural areas. Family farms have been replaced by highly specialized agriculture. Farming remains as important as ever, and farmers remain committed to a special way of life.

Building a 1920s Farm Site

In October 2005, there was a grand opening for the actual 1920s farm site. Designed to show what farming was like in the 1920s, the 145-acre site includes a farmhouse like those of the period. Also on the property are a large red barn, a garage, a granary, a corncrib, a machine shed, a chicken coop, and a windmill—all typical of the 1920s.

An event center includes offices, meeting places, and displays to help bring to life the history of agriculture for visitors. The farm is open from early May through the end of October. Special events are held each year such as Tractor, Engine, and Vintage Auto Show; Family Fun Day; Barn Dance; and Holidays on the Farm. Educational programs and tours of the farm are available.

Thanks to the generosity and vision of David Wessels, the heritage of Nebraska farm life can be shared with people throughout the world.

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